

Claims:

1. A shelf stable meal kit for slow cooker applications, the meal kit comprising:
 - a. a dehydrated vegetable product having an exterior surface composed of a hardened, closed cell structure; and
 - b. instructions for preparation of a meal using the dehydrated vegetable product in a slow cooker.
2. A shelf stable meal kit for slow cooker applications, the meal kit comprising:
 - a. a dehydrated vegetable product having a surface area, wherein at least 25% of the surface area comprises a vitreous like material; and
 - b. instructions for preparation of a meal using the dehydrated vegetable product in a slow cooker.
3. The meal kit according to claim 2 wherein the meal kit comprises an assortment of more than one type of dehydrated vegetable product, and wherein at least one type of dehydrated vegetable product of the assortment contains vitreous like material on at least 25% of the surface area.
4. The meal kit according to claim 3 wherein at least 5 weight percent of the assortment comprises dehydrated vegetable products having a moisture content of 12 weight percent or less, based upon total weight of the assortment.
5. The meal kit according to claim 3 wherein at least 5 weight percent of the assortment comprises dehydrated vegetable products having a Moisture Replacement Value of 80% or more, based upon total weight of the assortment.
6. The meal kit according to claim 2 further comprising a seasoning composition.
7. The meal kit according to claim 3 further comprising a seasoning composition.

8. The meal kit according to claim 6 wherein the seasoning composition and the dehydrated vegetable product are packaged together.
9. The meal kit according to claim 7 wherein the seasoning composition and the dehydrated vegetable product are packaged together.
10. The meal kit according to claim 8 wherein the moisture content of the dehydrated vegetable product and seasoning composition in the package is 8% or less.
11. The meal kit according to claim 9 wherein the moisture content of the dehydrated vegetable product and seasoning composition in the package is 8% or less.
12. A shelf stable meal kit for slow cooker applications, the meal kit comprising:
 - a. a dehydrated vegetable product having a stabilizing amount of a stabilizer; and
 - b. instructions for preparation of a meal using the dehydrated vegetable product in a slow cooker.
13. The meal kit according to claim 12 wherein the meal kit comprises an assortment of more than one type of dehydrated vegetable product, and wherein one or more types of dehydrated vegetable products of the assortment includes a stabilizing amount of a stabilizer.
14. The meal kit according to claim 13 wherein the stabilizer for each type of dehydrated vegetable product is the same.
15. The meal kit according to claim 12 wherein the stabilizer is selected from hydrocolloids, proteins, emulsifiers, firming agents, starch, texturizers, and mixtures thereof.
16. The meal kit according to claim 13 wherein the stabilizer is selected from hydrocolloids, proteins, emulsifiers, firming agents, starch, texturizers, and mixtures thereof.

17. The meal kit according to claim 12 wherein the stabilizer is provided as a coating on the surface of the dehydrated vegetable product.

18. The meal kit according to claim 13 wherein the stabilizer is provided as a coating on the surface of the dehydrated vegetable product.

19. The meal kit according to claim 12 wherein the stabilizer is infused in the dehydrated vegetable product.

20. The meal kit according to claim 13 wherein the stabilizer is infused in the dehydrated vegetable product.

21. A shelf stable meal kit for slow cooker applications, the meal kit comprising:

- a. a dehydrated vegetable product; and
- b. instructions for preparation of a meal using the dehydrated vegetable product in a slow cooker,

wherein at least about 5 weight percent of the dehydrated vegetable product is provided in a size that is not capable of rehydration to replace at least 80% of previously removed moisture under quick reconstituting conditions, the weight percent of the dehydrated vegetable product based upon total weight of the dehydrated vegetable product.

22. The meal kit according to claim 21 wherein the meal kit comprises an assortment of more than one type of dehydrated vegetable product, and wherein at least about 5 weight percent of the assortment comprises dehydrated vegetable product having a size that is not capable of rehydration to replace at least 80% of previously removed moisture under quick reconstituting conditions, the weight percent based upon total weight of the assortment.

23. A method for preparing a meal kit for slow cooker applications, the method comprising steps of:

- a. providing a vegetable;

- b. dehydrating the vegetable to provide a dehydrated vegetable product having an exterior surface composed of a hardened, closed cell structure; and
 - c. packaging the dehydrated vegetable product with instructions for preparation of a meal using a slow cooker.
24. A method for preparing a meal kit for slow cooker applications, the method comprising steps of:
- a. providing a vegetable;
 - b. dehydrating the vegetable to provide a dehydrated vegetable product having a surface area and a vitreous like material on at least 25% of the surface area; and
 - c. packaging the dehydrated vegetable product with instructions for preparation of a meal using the dehydrated vegetable product and a slow cooker.
25. A method for preparing a shelf stable meal kit for slow cooker applications, the method comprising steps of:
- a. providing a vegetable;
 - b. treating the vegetable with a stabilizing amount of a stabilizer to provide a stabilized vegetable product;
 - c. dehydrating the vegetable; and
 - d. packaging the stabilized vegetable product with instructions for preparation of a meal using the stabilized vegetable product and a slow cooker.
26. The method according to claim 25 wherein the dehydrating step is performed after the treating step.
27. The method according to claim 25 wherein the dehydrating step is performed before the treating step.
28. The method according to claim 25 wherein the treating step comprises providing the stabilizer on the surface of the vegetable.

29. The method according to claim 25 wherein the treating step comprises infusing the vegetable with the stabilizer.
30. A method for preparing a food product comprising rehydrating a dehydrated vegetable product having a moisture content of 12% or less, based upon total weight of the dehydrated vegetable product, for four hours or more, at an average temperature of less than 200°F.
31. The method according to claim 30 wherein the dehydrated vegetable product has a moisture content of 8% or less.
32. The method according to claim 30 comprising rehydrating an assortment of more than one type of dehydrated vegetable products, wherein the assortment has a moisture content of 12% or less, based upon total weight of the assortment.